

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHONOU 353

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, DM

SUBJ: KANGAGROO COURT SENTENCES SEVEN ALLEGED COUP PLOTTERS
TO DEATH

REF COTONOU 295

BEGIN SUMMARY: DAHOMEY'S NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, A
PURELY POLITICAL BODY, HAS CONDEMNED SEVEN PERSONS TO DEATH IN
CONNECTION WITH THE ATTEMPT TO OVERTHROW PRES KEREKOU IN JAN.
THE TRIAL WAS ENTIRELY "KANGAROO" IN CHARACTER, IN VIOLATION
OF EVERY GENERALLY ACCEPTED JUDICIAL PRINCIPLE. PUBLIC REACTION
HERE IS ONE OF HELPLESS HORROR. END SUMMARY

1. NATIONAL RADIO ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT, 17 MARCH, THAT
DAHOMY'S NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (NRC) ACTING AS A
"REVOLUTIONARY TRIBUNAL" HAS SENTENCED TO DEATH SEVEN PERSONS
(FOUR IN ABSENTIA) ALLEGED TO HAVE TAKEN PART IN AN EFFORT
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TO BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN THE COUNTRY'S LEADERSHIP TWO MONTHS

AGO. THOSE SLATED FOR EXECUTION INCLUDE FORMER LABMIN CAPT JANVIER ASSOGBA (THE MILITARY LEADER OF THE ATTEMPT TO OUST PRES KEREKOU), FORMER PRES EMILE DERLIN ZINSOU, THE UNDP RESIDENT REP IN DAKAR BERTIN BORNA, AND A PROMINENT CATHOLIC CLERGYMAN. SEVEN OTHERS WERE GIVEN LONG PRISON TERMS, FIVE WITH HARD LABOR FOR LIFE. FIFTEEN YEAR TERM WAS INFLICTED ON RESPECTED DIRGEN OF PLAN ROBERT TAGNON, THE GOVERNMENT'S MAIN ECONOMIC PLANNER AND CONTACT MAN IN AID MATTERS FOR FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL LENDING INSTITUTIONS.

2. WHILE PUBLIC REACTION IS ONE OF HORROR AND THERE IS ANXIOUS TALK OF IMPRESSING KEREKOU ON THE NEED TO EXERCISE CLEMENCY, IT APPEARS DOUBTFUL THAT SENTIMENT AGAINST THE JUDGMENT WILL BE MOBILIZED EFFECTIVELY. ALL MEDIA ARE CONTROLLED BY THE REGIME AND THE POLICE HAVE THE POPULATION PRETTY WELL COWED. ALTHOUGH NIGERIAN AMB INFORMED ME SEVERAL DAYS AGO THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD INTERVENE IF DEATH SENTENCES ANNOUNCED, THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGN OF ANY SUCH ACTION AS YET (HE MADE DEMARCHES LAST WEEK ON MINISTERS ALLADAYE, AIKPE, AND AZONHIHO, EXPRESSING NIGERIA'S CONCERN THAT THERE BE NO BLOOD-SHED OR DEATH SENTENCES IN DAHOMEY).

3. COMMENT: PROCEEDINGS OF THE "TRIBUNAL" LIKE THOSE OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY WHICH PRECEDED IT (SEE REF), WERE OF KANGAROO CHARACTER, I.E. IN UTTER VIOLATION OF UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENERALLY ACCEPTED JUDICIAL PRINCIPLES. IN ADDITION TO JUDICIAL DEFICIENCIES INDICATED REFTL, A) THERE IS NO REFERENCE IN JUDGMENT TO SPECIFIC LAWS VIOLATED, B) JUDGMENT WAS REACHED BY ACCLAIM OF APPROXIMATELY ONE HUNDRED POLITICALLY APPOINTED PERSONS PRESENT (NRC PLUS DISTRICT REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL REPS.)

C) APPARENTLY NO MAGISTRATES TOOK PART, D) THERE WAS NO OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ACCUSED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES OR TO HAVE ACCESS TO COUNSEL, E) TRIAL WAS CONDUCTED IN ONE SITTING OF FOURTEEN HOURS, AND F) IN MOST CASES, THERE IS LITTLE OR NO RELATIONSHIP OF PENALTIES TO EXTENT OF ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT. IN FACT, WE KNOW OF NO WAY IN WHICH THIS SO-CALLED TRIAL EVEN FAINTLY SATISFIED GENERALLY ACCEPTED PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

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4. THERE IS A TRADITION OF NON-VIOLENCE IN THIS DIVIDED AND COUP-RIDDEN COUNTRY. THIS IS THE ONE CHARACTERISTIC OF LOCAL POLITICS THAT DAHOMEANS ARE PROUD OF. IN VARIOUS QUARTERS FEAR IS BEING EXPRESSED (AND SHARED EVEN BY HUMBLE FOLK PREVIOUSLY

SYMPATHETIC WITH THE REGIME), THAT IF EXECUTIONS TAKE PLACE, THE REMAINING STAGES OF A MARXIST-LENINIST POLICE STATE WILL BE

IMPOSED, AND THAT THERE WILL BE REPRISALS AND COUNTER-REPRISALS
BY THE FAMILIES AND TRIBES OF THE VICTIMS. END COMMENT.

5. MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS WILL FOLLOW TOMORROW.
ENGLE

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